DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 540 CS 209 661

AUTHOR Holmes, Julia Goolsby
TITLE Writing in Kindergarten Classrooms: A Report of an Experimental Study of the Effects of Independent Writing Time and Exposure to a Writing Role Model on Selected Kindergarten Children.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Concept Formation; *Kindergarten; Primary Education; *Reading Readiness; Reading Writing Relationship; Role Models; Vocabulary Development; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS *Print Awareness

ABSTRACT

A study examined whether there were any differences in the concepts about print, writing vocabulary, and prereading performance of selected kindergarten children who were provided with (1) independent writing time and exposure to a writing model in the school environment, (2) independent writing time without the writing role model, and (3) neither the independent writing nor the writing role model. Subjects, 72 kindergarten students in a school in Jasper, Alabama, were placed randomly in one of the three groups and received one of the three treatments over a six-week period. All subjects were posttested within two weeks following the treatment period using all three measures. The results of the posttest indicated that independent writing time is conducive to children's acquisition of concepts about printed language, which occurred through creative expression during independent writing time without direct, formal instruction. However, a writing role model did have positive results on children's writing vocabulary performance. Finally, independent writing time, with or without exposure to a writing role model, did not improve performance significantly in prereading skills. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED268540

Writing in Kindergarten Classrooms

A Report

of

An Experimental Study of the Effects of Independent Writing Time and Exposure to a Writing Role Model on Selected Kindergarten Children

by

Julia Goolsby Holmes

Mailing Address:

2800 Heritage Drive
Jasper, Alabama 35501

CS209661

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Julia G. Holmes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Introduction

The advent of early childhood education has illuminated the need for investigations of writing with younger children. Recent studies found that nonreading children had acquired some basic understanding about the graphic form of written language. Gibson (1970) and Lavine (1972) identified that children three months of age, came to classify graphic productions as writing or nonwriting through their visual features, not their letters. Calkins (1979) substantiated earlier work by Wheeler (1971) who reported that children's writing progressed from scribbles to designs, to pictures, and then to letters, words in isolation, words in phrases, and words in sentences.

Graves and Clay are among those researchers who investigated children's behaviors as they acquire skill in writing. Graves (1973) found that prewriting, writing, and rewriting were evidenced by first grade children. Clay's research (1975) with five-year-old children enabled her to identify certain concepts and principles of writing that children employed in attempting graphic productions to look like writing. Implications are that children come to school with a wealth of knowledge about print that can be applied to instruction in reading and writing.

Researchers have indicated a need for educators to take advantage of children's concepts about print and their early experiences with writing. The classic article, "Write First, Read Later," by Chomsky (1971) proposed that children be permitted to be active participants in teaching themselves to read by allowing them to write first, reversing the usual order of reading first. By allowing children to write first, they learn to trust their linguistic judgments. The same proposal has been made by Clay (1975). She stated: "Observing children in classrooms has led me to the understanding that in the informal infant room program where child discovery is valued and creative writing encouraged, the writing plays a significant part in early reading progress" (p. 338).

The relationship of writing to reading has been affirmed further by E. Gibson in the article, "The Ontogeny of Reading." He proposed that reading has a dual origin and begins prior to formal instruction. He wrote:

> I think we could agree that it (reading) has twin beginnings. One is its linguistic origin...it is a specialized form of speech; and one is its origin in writing...making marks on a piece of paper (p. 136).

Also, Goodman (1976) has contended that reading and writing can only develop in a rich, literate environment in which reading and writing are permitted to occur.

Although these studies and theories have confirmed the importance of providing children with opportunities to engage in prewriting and writing before learning to read and concurrently with learning to read, traditionally, this has not been done. Reasons have been twofold. First, major emphasis has been placed on children learning to read first (Chomsky, 1971; Graves, 1978). Secondly, writing in the early grades has focused on instructing children in correct letter formations, conventions of spelling, and the practice of penmanship. Research by Graves (1978) indicated that writing is seldom encouraged and sometimes not even permitted in the early grades. Graves also examined role models in the school environment and discovered children have few writing models in the school. It appears that educators do not perceive the importance of providing children with opportunities to write and do not recognize the value of modeling writing for children (Graves, 1978; Shanahan, 1979).

There is a dearth of research on the effects of prewriting and writing experiences on kindergarten children. Therefore, this research study was conducted to determine the effects of the provision of independent writing opportunities and exposure to a writing role model in the school environment with respect to gains in (a) concepts about print, (b) writing vocabulary, and (c) pre-reading performance, of selected kindergarten children.

The Research

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was any significant difference in the (a) concepts about print, (b) writing vocabulary, and (c) prereading performance of selected kindergarten children who were provided independent writing time and exposure to a writing model in the school environment as compared to selected kindergarten children who were provided with independent writing time without the writing role model, and with kindergarten children who were not provided with independent writing time or a writing role model. A 10-week period was used for the investigation.

Instrumentation

Instruments used to determine performance in the various areas were selected from the literature. The Concepts About Print Test (Clay, 1972) was used to measure subjects' knowledge of printed language. Writing performance was measured by The Inventory of Writing Vocabulary for Rating Progress (Robinson, 1973). Prereading skills were measured by The Metropolitan Readiness Tests, Forms P and Q (Nurss & McGauvran, 1976).

Subjects

Subjects were 72 kindergarten students from three classrooms in an elementary school in Jasper, Alabama. A table of random numbers was used to place subjects into one of three research groups. The resulting three research groups consisted of 24 subjects per group. Predetermined treatments were assigned to the three groups.

Procedure

Initiation of experimental treatment took place in each of the classrooms immediately following two weeks of pretesting. Experimental Group 1 received 20 minutes of independent writing time with exposure to an adult writing role model for 3 days a week for the 6-week duration. Experimental Group 2 received an equivalent of 20 minutes of independent writing time but without the presence of an adult writing role model for the 6-week period. The Control Group met with the researcher for the equivalent amount of time but was provided writing skill sheets as a placebo. All subjects were posttested within 2 weeks following the 6-week treatment period using all three measures accepted for the study.

Data Analysis

The analysis of variance and Scheffe' multiple range techniques were used to determine if there were any significant differences in the performance among subjects receiving independent writing time concurrently with exposure to a writing role model, subjects receiving independent writing time without a writing role model, and subjects receiving no special treatment. Because there was a significant difference among the groups on gain scores of The Concepts About Print Test and The Inventory of Writing Vocabulary for Rating Progress, hypotheses one and two were rejected in their null form. Because there was not a significant difference in gain scores on The Metropolitan Readiness Tests, hypothesis three was accepted as stated in its null form.

Summary of Findings

Within the limitations of this study, the following findings were:

1. The statistically significant difference between the experimental groups and the control group with regard to gains in concepts about print indicated that independent writing time was conducive to children's acquisition of concepts about printed language.

2. The data seemed to indicate that the acquisition of concepts about printed language occurred through creative expression during the independent writing time and without direct, formal instruction.

3. The statistically significant gains in writing vocabulary by the experimental group which was provided exposure to a writing role model during the independent writing time indicated that exposure to a writing role model in the school environment had positive results on children's writing vocabulary performance.

4. Independent writing time, with or without exposure to a writing role model, did not improve performance significantly in prereading skills as determined by the Metropolitan Readiness Tests.

Discussion

The findings from this study support reports that children acquire knowledge about written language through exposure to it and without direct instruction (Goodman, 1981; Lavine, 1972). This was reflected statistically in the gain scores on The Concepts About Print Test and The Inventory of Writing Vocabulary for Rating Progress. It was

reflected also in the graphic productions collected and in the observations of subjects engaged in writing during the investigation.

Subjects were able to produce writing samples as requested instead of drawing or scribbling. This supported earlier findings of Legrun (1932) and Hildreth (1936).

The graphic productions collected during the investigations reflected the concepts and principles reported by Clay (1975). Peer modeling and the opportunity to employ the concepts and principles may have contributed to the significant difference among the groups in the Concepts About Print and the Writing Vocabulary.

Directionality and spacing were among the principles evidenced. There were few incidences where directional principles were ignored, and the subjects resorted to mirror writing or other patterns. Of interest was the concept of spacing. When subjects of the Control Group did their writing skill sheet, they actually used their fingers to do the spacing. Subjects of both experimental groups practiced the concept of spacing but without the aid of their fingers. It appeared the subjects of the experimental group felt the freedom to write without the constraints of exactness that is often emphasized in formal instruction.

Name writing was evidenced by all of the subjects. Subjects used letters in their names to create other words or strings of letters. Although name writing was prevalent in the beginning weeks of the study, it became less evident as the investigation continued.

The copying and inventory principles were employed frequently by the subjects at the onset of the investigation. After writing their names, subjects wrote names of other students and family members. They would copy what each other wrote. Subjects of Experimental Group 1 who were exposed to the writing role model copied the idea of what the role model was writing, e.g. a letter, a list, a story rather than attempting to copy verbatim what she was writing. Copying became less evident as time elapsed and subjects were being more creative and inventive. At this juncture, subjects exhibited more of the flexibility, generating, and contrastive principles.

The abbreviation principle was employed by most all of the subjects. This was a finding unlike that of Clay (1975) who found that only the better readers in her study used the abbreviation principle. Perhaps the environmental influence of the movie, "E.T.," might have contributed to this difference. E.T. was the abbreviation that occurred most frequently, but subjects were able to transfer this learning to create other abbreviations.

During the course of the investigation, subjects seemed to exhibit more variety and fluency in their writing. In the beginning, the children appeared overwhelmed with the notion of writing anything they wanted. However, for the first several sessions subjects not exposed to the writing role model, wrote the lower and upper case alphabet letters and numerals. Subsequently, they began to exercise the freedom to experiment, and as a result, the writing became more varied and detailed. The writing samples reflected a finding of other studies that have concluded students write more when they write about topics of their own choosing (Graves, 1973; Melas, 1974).

The findings of this study paralleled some of the reports related to writing role models by Graves (1978). Subjects of this study who were provided exposure to a writing role model made significant gains in writing vocabulary. These subjects were exposed to a variety of types of writing and discourse by the writing role model. Consequently, their writing samples reflected more detail, variety and fluency. Graves (1978) reported that in the few schools where good writing occurred, teachers were involved in the writing process, modeling the craft of writing.

Another type of modeling that became apparent through the observatory procedure was that of peer modeling. The subjects appeared to influence each other's writing to a great degree. This finding concurs with that of Dyson and

Genishi who have stated, "modeling, assistance, and encouragement of peers promoted growth in writing skills" (1982, p. 131).

Finally, the method of data collection of this study provided for observation of children engaged in the writing process. This provided insights about children and writing that would not have been otherwise possible.

As subjects of this study wrote, they appeared to know the purpose for writing as a communication skill. They were anxious to read to each other what they wrote. Writing and reading were never separate entities during this time as they so often are in the school curriculum. The relationship of writing to reading seemed to be understood and natural.

At the onset of the investigation, subjects seemed preoccupied with "correctness." Inquiries of how to formulate a letter and how to spell a word seemed important to them. However, as the investigation continued, the children seemed less skeptical about writing correctly and wrote much more. This reflects the opinion of Holbrook (1965) who stated, "Children become so terrified of putting down a word misspelt, particularly an unfamiliar word, that they don't put down any words" (p. 69).

From the point of view of the researcher of this study, young children are motivated to communicate through writing by exposure to print and by persons modeling writing. In

addition, many concepts about printed language and creative writing may be learned naturally if children are provided the opportunity to write in a rich literate environment.

Implications

Schools are responsible for providing a well-balanced curriculum designed to meet the needs of individual students. Curriculum developers would do well to review the status of writing in the school curriculum.

The status of writing needs to be reviewed from the amount of time alloted for writing programs. Shanahan (1979) reported that writing is currently assigned a rather insignificant amount of instruction time in elementary classrooms. Concurring with this Graves stated, "The provision of more than 30 minutes per week for writing was an above average accomodation for children's writing (1978, p. 638).

Secondly, the status of writing needs to be reviewed with consideration given to the quality of writing programs in the curriculum. Which programs facilitate or hinder the learning of writing in school? Graves stated, "Our (American education) preoccupation with handwriting, grammar exercises, language art activities in spelling books are all preliminaries, avoidances for an event that never occurs, writing" (1978, p. 636). The need for a complete revision of our ideas about the way in which children acquire knowledge of

written language has been suggested (Chomsky, 1971; Goodman, 1974; Smith, 1977).

Findings of this study also have implications for teachers who are faced with the responsibility of providing instruction in the skills of literacy. Teachers need to examine the amount of time spent in direct instruction in writing as compared to the amount of time children are provided the opportunity of observing writing models. There seems to be a need for the provision of independent writing time in the early childhood and elementary grades, and for teachers to model the craft of writing. The review of literature indicates that young children come to school with a wealth of knowledge about writing and concepts of writing behaviors children demonstrate. This range could be from scribbling to fluent writing. Therefore, opportunities for independent writing which encourage creative expression and experimentation with print should be provided.

It may be implied from the writing samples collected during this study that children can compose and write before they master handwriting. However, in most schools children are not provided with the opportunity as teachers are preoccupied with the mastery of letter formation and handwriting as prerequisite skills to composing and writing (Graves, 1978). Teachers need to capitalize on children's interest in writing. Bissex implied the need for pedagogical change when she

stated, "The logic by which we teach is not always the logic by which children learn" (1980, p. 201).

Finally, it may be implied from observations of children engaged in writing during this study that children do discover the relationship between writing and reading. Children need to discover the purpose and function of reading and writing. It appears that instruction in reading and writing should be confluent for optimum learning to occur in both areas.

Implications are that children come to school with a wealth of knowledge about print that could be applied to formal instruction in reading and writing. More research is needed to clarify the role of independent writing time in the school curriculum. Also, the effects of a writing role model at different grade levels need to be determined.

Bissex, G. Patterns of development in writing: A case study. Theory Into Practice, 1980, 19, 197-201.

Calkins, L. Learning to throw away. Language Arts, 1979, 56, 747-752.

Chomsky, C. Write first, read later. Childhood Education, 1971, 47, 296-299.

Clay, M. Concepts about print: A test booklet. Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972.

Clay, M. What did I write? Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975.

Dyson, A. & Genishi, C. Whatta ya tryin to write?: Writing as an interactive process. Language Arts, 1982, 59, 126-132.

Gibson, E. The ontogeny of reading. American Psychologist, 1970, 25, 136-143.

Goodman, K. Effective teachers of reading know language and children. Elementary English, 1974, 51, 823-828.

Goodman, Y. & Altwerger B. Print awareness in pre-school children: A study of the development of literacy in preschool children. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona, 1981. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 210 629).

Goodman, Y. Viewpoints. Language Arts, 1980, 57, 601-603.

Graves, D. Children's writing: Research directions and hypotheses based upon an examination of the writing processes of seven-year-old children (Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1973). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1973, 34, 6255A. (University Microfilm No. 74-08375).

Graves, D. Balance the basics: Let them write. New York: Ford Foundation, 1978.

Hildreth, G. Developmental sequences in name-writing. Child Development, 1936, 7, 291-303.

Holbrook, D. The secret places. University, Ala: University of Alabama Press, 1965.

Holmes, J. An experimental study of the effects of independent writing time and exposure to a writing role model on selected kindergarten children. (Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Alabama, 1984). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1985, 45, 1984A.

Lavine, L. The development of perception of writing in prereading children: A cross cultural study. (Doctoral Dissertation, Cornell University, 1972). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1973, 33, 4491-B, (University Microfilms No. 73-6657)

Legrun, A. How and what do preschoolers write? Zeitschrift fur Padagogische Psychologie, 1932, 33, 322-331.

Melas, D. Differences of themes in assigned and unassigned creative writing of elementary school children (Doctoral Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1974). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1975, 35, 6577A-6578A. (University Microfilms No. 75-9476).

Nurss, J. & McGauvran, M. The Metropolitan Readiness Tests (level teacher's manual). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

Robinson, S. Predicting early reading progress. Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Auckland Library, 1973.

Shanahan, T. The writing crisis: A survey and a solution. Phi Delta Kappan, 1979, 61, 216-217.

Smith, F. Making sense of reading--and of reading instruction. Harvard Education Review, 1977, 47, 386-395.

Wheeler, M. E. Untutored acquisition of writing skill. (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Human Development, Cornell University, 1971). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1971, 32, 5503-B. (University Microfilms No. 72-10533).